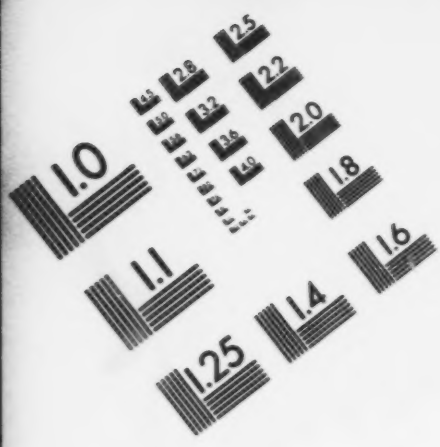

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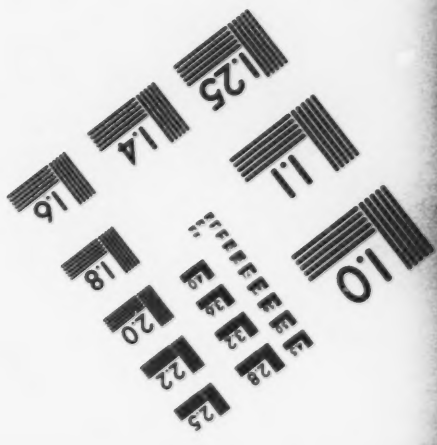

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ABSTRACT

The Center for Urban Research in Education (CURE), jointly conceived by the Portland (Oregon) Public Schools and Portland State University, was established in 1987 by the Oregon State Legislature to explore solutions to the educational problems of at-risk student populations, especially those in urban settings. This paper shares the results of CURE's first 3 years in the hope of inspiring other universities and school districts to collaborate on similar programs. CURE's most important guiding principles are that all students can learn, that school-university collaboration is essential to solve complex educational problems, and that teachers, principals, students, parents, and communities are vital to this research effort. CURE's current research agenda includes three program areas critical to the success of high risk students: dropout prevention, effective instructional practices, and effective school leadership. Specific projects within each of these categories are described at length. CURE's first 2 years were marked by a number of priorities: (1) developing an effective organization capable of conducting and disseminating research; (2) identifying a research program responsive to at-risk students' needs; and (3) building the necessary collaborative networks to ensure a relevant and useful program. (10 references) (MLH)

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BUILDING A COLLABORATIVE EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH CENTER:

THE PORTLAND PUBLIC SCHOOLS & PORTLAND STATE UNIVERSITY EXPERIENCE

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Abstract

The Center for Urban Research in Education (CURE) was jointly conceived by the Portland Public Schools and Portland State University, and was established in 1987 by the Oregon State Legislature to explore solutions to the educational problems of "at-risk" student populations, especially those in urban settings. CURE is housed within the university's School of Education, but draws from the expertise and energy of both the school district and the university in a truly collaborative effort to improve the lives of students. A basic tenet of CURE's philosophy is that research conducted solely by universities on schools has limited potential to improve educational policy and practice. A mutual and interactive process of research is necessary for accumulated findings to affect decisions pertinent to major issues of urban education.

This presentation will share the results of the first three years of CURE in the hope of providing impetus to other universities and school districts to collaborate in concerted programs of research on the critical issues affecting their students. Topics include specific strategies to meet challenges of research agenda setting, center management, internal communications, resource development, and successful dissemination of findings for multiple audiences.

The principles and values which guided the development of CURE's research agenda and processes will also be discussed. For example, CURE activities are developed from the belief that all students can learn and that research-based solutions can be used to create schools in which students achieve at levels which will help them become productive members of society while meeting their personal goals. This belief has led CURE to reject the typical research paradigm of simply studying dysfunction to learn why students are failing. Rather, CURE has set a goal to conduct research to learn more about the factors of success for our students and to explore alternative policies, programs, and curricula which might enhance those factors.

INTRODUCTION

Never has the need for relevant and effective educational research been greater than in this final decade of the 20th century. The multiple problems facing our youth and the schools who serve them have been documented extensively by professional educators, politicians and the media. The increasingly monumental problems of illiteracy, poverty, drugs, and violence are spurring varied programs to among other things restructure schools, develop school-community partnerships, create more relevant and multi-cultural curricula, and to professionalize teaching. As reforms are proposed and implemented it is essential that the research community take an active role with policy makers and practitioners to interpret results and their implications.

To meet this challenge for effective educational research will require universities and school districts to collaborate closely and intensely. Improved collaboration of universities and schools is often cited as being essential to the improvement of education (Arends, 1990; Broadbent, 1980; Carlson, 1984; Caruso, 1981; Everhart, 1988; Frechting, 1982; Hathaway, 1985; Lambert, 1984; Richards, 1984). However, the marriage of these two very different organizations has always been difficult at best. Hathaway (1985) identifies four guidelines for improving school district-university collaborations: 1) clear expectations, 2) open communications, 3) shared control, and 4) pooled resources and two-way opportunities for working together. These are extended into nine guidelines for successful conduct of research by school systems and universities. They are: 1) involve both parties early in the planning stage, 2) make your needs known,

3) base the research on common needs, 4) use simple language and common sense, 5) share control, 6) clarify procedures, 7) respect each institution's rules, 8) communicate the end results, and 9) establish and maintain trust and a common vision.

In a move to aid education through the kind of collaborative research just described, the 1987-88 Oregon state legislature created the Center for Urban Research in Education (CURE) as a unique joint research partnership between Portland State University and Portland Public Schools. This paper will share the results of the first two and one half years of CURE in the hope of providing impetus to other universities and urban school districts to collaborate in concerted programs of research on the critical issues affecting their students.

MISSION AND PHILOSOPHY

The primary mission of the Center for Urban Research in Education (CURE) is to explore solutions to the educational problems of "at-risk" student populations, especially those in urban settings. CURE is working toward these solutions through a variety of related research, training, technical assistance, and dissemination activities. These activities incorporate strong collaborative relationships between educational researchers, practitioners, and policy makers throughout the Portland metropolitan area, the state, and the nation.

CURE's mission to serve students at risk of academic failure fits well with the emerging mission of the School of Education at Portland State University to focus upon

an urban education agenda. Dean Robert Everhart (1989) defines the new mission as developing a "focus upon the education of low achieving students and the conditions under which such education occurs." CURE will support this important process by participating in planning where appropriate and continuing to provide research direction and opportunities.

A number of principles or beliefs guided the conception of CURE and its subsequent implementation. They are:

1. All students can learn.
2. Assisting students to learn at their maximum potential will require complex solutions to complex problems.
3. Responses to the problems and possibilities for education in urban settings will apply to the entire state and nation.
4. Collaboration between university and school district-based researchers is essential if we are to identify solutions to the problems of education and realize its promise.
5. Teachers, principals, students, parents and communities are vital partners in this research effort.

The first and most important belief is that all students can learn. Further, it is believed that research-based solutions can be used to create schools in which students achieve at levels which will help them become productive members of society while meeting their personal goals. This leads us to reject a typical research paradigm of simply studying dysfunction to learn why students are failing. Rather, CURE's goal is to whenever possible research the factors of success for our students and to identify alternative policies, programs, and curricula which might enhance those factors.

Another critical cornerstone of CURE's philosophy is that those people working directly with students must be involved meaningfully in design of research and the

dissemination of findings and implications. While CURE is housed within the Portland State University School of Education, it draws from the expertise and energy of both the Portland Public School district and the university in a truly collaborative effort to improve the lives of students. Research conducted solely by universities on schools has limited potential to improve educational policy and practice. A mutual and interactive process of research is necessary for accumulated findings to affect decisions on major issues of education. Several forms of research collaboration are being tried and studied within CURE's projects. More significant involvement of students, parents and the community is a major goal for the future.

In summary, CURE's mission and philosophy can be characterized as broad and inclusive within the "at-risk agenda." Thus, a number of content issues are being studied and a number of different research methods are supported. We are not simply implementing a predefined agenda of work in a tightly defined area. Rather, we continually assess and question the direction of our research and make adjustments where necessary. While corrections have been necessary and certainly will be again, we feel this is the correct approach for CURE. Many pieces of the educational puzzle must be uncovered and connected to significantly affect the lives of students in Portland, Oregon as well as the rest of the nation.

ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE

CURE is run by a small professional staff headed by Deputy Director, Dr. Gary Nave. Two Research Associates, Dr. Linda Davenport and Dr. James Kushman, also lead major research projects and provide staff support. The CURE secretary, Ava Lynch, rounds out the permanent staff housed within the PSU School of Education. PSU Education faculty members and Portland Schools staff supplement the core staff by serving as part time CURE Associates. For example, some serve as principal investigators of research projects, while others provide assistance in design or conduct of studies, editing of manuscripts, and creation of computer data files.

Dr. Nave reports to Co-Executive Directors, who represent Portland State University and the Portland Public School District. They are the Dean of PSU's School of Education, Dean Robert Everhart, and the Director of Research and Evaluation for Portland Public Schools, Dr.Walter Hathaway. A CURE Management Team responsible for setting center policy, approving the research agenda, and maintaining a long term development plan consists of the two Co-Executive Directors, the Deputy Director, and one additional representative from each of the two sponsoring institutions. The Deputy Director chairs the team and manages the day to day operation of the center. The representation of both PSU and Portland Schools on the policy setting team facilitates good communication between the major collaborators.

CURE maintains an Advisory Council of ten representatives from different perspectives important to students at risk. The council includes members from educational

and research organizations, community service agencies, and the business community. The group meets twice a year to respond to the staff's planned project activities and to advise on resource development efforts. Between the management team and the advisory council a wide array of important viewpoints are brought to bear upon the CURE research agenda. This process is not always efficient in the short term, but it has already proven to be effective and satisfying as common understandings are worked out.

RESEARCH IN PROGRESS

CURE's current research agenda includes three program areas critical to the success of students who are at-risk of school failure. The program areas are:

- **Dropout Prevention:** Keeping Youth In School And On The Road To Success As Adults
- **Effective Instructional Practices** With At-Risk Students
- **Effective School Leadership** And School System Organizational Reforms For Helping Disadvantaged Students Succeed.

The three program areas were selected for their importance to Portland schools and the availability of skilled and interested researchers. Each program builds upon work from a number of complementary projects which this section will briefly describe. These projects are funded for 1989/90.

Program Area I - Dropout Prevention

Project: Successful Transition from Middle School to High School for Academically At-Risk Students.

An alarming number of young people today are dropping out of school before or during their transition into high school. Dr. Gary Nave is principal investigator for this new collaborative research project with Lane Middle School and Marshall High School to learn how schools can better facilitate successful transitions for their students. An immediate goal is to discover how students perceive their transition experiences to high school. Academically at-risk students who are succeeding in high school and those who are not are being interviewed and compared. In addition, a number of data sources are being examined to determine if specific "middle school profiles" seem to lead to immediate dropout or poor high school achievement. The ultimate goal is to use project results and literature findings to identify ways the two schools can better intervene in the dropout process for their students who are academically at-risk. Results will be disseminated through a research bulletin and a CURE center paper, and an annotated bibliography of relevant programs and services for academically at-risk students is planned. Two federal grant proposals have been submitted which would greatly expand the work within the area of enhancing student engagement in the middle and high school years. One would develop and research a comprehensive program of dropout prevention for handicapped students and the other would hasten implementation and research of the discontinuous learner program being developed at Marshall High School.

Project: Factors Leading to Success Turnabout for African American Students.

This doctoral dissertation study by Michael Grice, PPS Evaluation Specialist, is a strong example of CURE's commitment to research "what works" rather than simply studying dysfunction. The study's goal is to add to the body of knowledge on African American achievement motivation in the public school setting towards a working theoretical model to support new intervention strategies. A number of "turnabout" students have been identified who showed sustained performance at a level above a pattern of previous low achievement. Case studies will be conducted for ten of these African American turnabout students. Data sources will include interviews of teachers, family members, associates, and the students themselves. CURE will publish a center paper highlighting findings and implications for school intervention to help African Americans and other minorities.

Program Area II - Instructional Practices

Project: Effective Mathematics Instruction for Black, Hispanic, and Native American Students.

Dr. Linda Ruiz Davenport, project investigator, is conducting this study of student learning in middle school and high school general mathematics classes. An inquiry-oriented mathematics curriculum focusing on concept development is being compared to a more traditional direct instruction approach focusing on basic skills. Student pretest and posttest data are being collected in both instructional settings on mathematics achievement, mathematical problem-solving, and attitudes towards mathematics. During

1988-89, approximately 1500 students were involved in the project, one-half of whom were members of minority ethnic groups. Replication in 1989-90 includes an additional 1200 students. In addition, case studies of the mathematical thinking of selected ethnic minority students are being conducted using clinical interview techniques. A review of the literature on the mathematics learning of ethnic minority students and a report on first year results are currently being prepared. CURE, Portland schools, and the Math Learning Center at PSU submitted a proposal for funding from a national program to fund implementation and research of innovative math programs. The proposal has advanced to the final stage of review and if funded will support schoolwide employment of the program in the two "feeder" middle schools for a high school in an economically disadvantaged area of Portland.

Project: A Study of Effective Teachers of Academically At-Risk Students.

Some teachers are extremely effective at working with academically at-risk students who typically feel alienated towards school. Dr. Ken Peterson, PSU Associate Professor, and Betsy Bennet, Portland Public Schools administrator, are co-principal investigators on a project learning more about the process of "reaching" at-risk students which effective teachers use. They identified 15 teachers recognized for excellent work with at-risk populations across grades K-12. Answers to how and why they have been successful were gathered through interviews and focus groups. The goal of the project is to identify exemplary behaviors, activities, attitudes and approaches that define patterns of effectiveness. A CURE center paper is now being finalized to report important

similarities and differences between the successful teachers. Implications for possible transfer of effective practices to other teachers will also be discussed.

Project: Reading Recovery Training for First Grade Students.

Dr. Colin Dunkeld, PSU Professor, heads this collaborative project with Portland schools. He spent a full year at Ohio State University being trained as a Reading Recovery Teacher Trainer. PSU is one of only six universities sanctioned to develop this program in their respective regions of the country. Reading Recovery identifies students experiencing difficulty learning to read in the first grade and through individualized tutoring attempts to bring them to at least grade level and give them the necessary learning skills to continue their progress. Dunkeld is currently training 10 teacher leaders who are simultaneously implementing the program in their classrooms. Reading Recovery has already shown itself to be a very effective attack on the problem of reading failure and CURE is pleased to support its implementation in Portland and further the necessary research of its effects for different categories of students.

Project: Study Guides & Their Effectiveness in Helping At-Risk Students Learn from Content Area Texts.

The use of study guides is a common practice in pre-service education of teachers, but research suggests that content-area teachers spend a negligible amount of their class time using such strategies. Dr. Carroll Tama, PSU Associate Professor, and two faculty colleagues believe study guides incorporate many factors which positively affect at-risk

students. This project was initiated in the spring of 1989 to examine how teachers perceive, create and use study guides to enhance learning with students at-risk in middle and secondary school. A survey was administered to 75 practicing secondary teachers to determine their perceptions. Interviews and observations of classrooms are being conducted this year to provide information about how study guides are actually used with at-risk students. A journal article has been submitted for publication to describe findings and a grant proposal is being prepared to support development and implementation of a workshop program to encourage and train teachers in the use of study guides.

Project: An Investigation of Academically At-Risk Students and Special Instructional Programs Designed to Meet Their Needs.

The Portland Public School District is currently changing a number of instructional programs and delivery systems for at-risk students. This project is a collaborative effort between the district and CURE to increase the capacity to evaluate and research such policy and programmatic changes. A longitudinal data base is being developed to capture information on the special instructional services PPS students receive over time. Thus, it is possible to trace the relationship of services and outcomes across years. Current activities include completion and documentation of the longitudinal data base and initial census-related analyses of that data base.

Program Area III - Leadership and Organizational Reform

Project: Creating More Effective Schools for Disadvantaged Students Through Teacher Commitment and Leadership.

The purpose of this project is to test and refine our understanding of linkages between school conditions, teacher workplace commitment, teacher leadership, and academic success in schools serving disadvantaged students. Jim Kushman, project investigator, is analyzing survey data from 750 teachers in 65 Portland elementary and middle schools, principal and student surveys, achievement histories, and other school-level data. Case studies were also conducted in three disadvantaged schools with high, medium and low profiles of teacher commitment. The study ultimately seeks to understand how successful disadvantaged schools build and enhance a sense of high teacher commitment to the school, its values and goals, and to student learning. Findings and implications for educational reform and school organization development will be reported in two center papers to be published this Spring.

Project: The Nature of Leadership in Urban Elementary Schools.

Dr. William Greenfield, PSU Professor, initiated a project in 1988-89 to research the school leadership practices and organizational routines that characterize successful and less successful disadvantaged schools. The exploratory research included observations and interviews with principals and teachers in different schools towards understanding the nature of school leadership. A project center paper available through CURE is entitled

Teacher Perspectives on Principal Leadership Strategies. A monograph entitled *The Urban School Principalship: A Review of the Literature*, is planned for the summer of 1990.

Project: Elementary School Reform: An Examination of Exemplary National Programs.

Through research and practitioner wisdom a great deal is known about the conditions and ingredients necessary for school success, yet we lack the know how and systematic commitment to put these conditions and ingredients together in the right order. This study is gathering information on how to better design alternative elementary schools serving urban at-risk populations. Dr. Tom Chenoweth, PSU Assistant Professor, has conducted a review of the research literature and is visiting several exemplary alternative school sites nationwide. A center monograph will be published later this year to synthesize the research on creating school organizations that are more responsive to students at-risk, and to describe the characteristics of the exemplary programs. In addition, Chenoweth is working with the Portland Public Schools Curriculum Department to develop a plan for the creation of a "state-of-the-art" laboratory elementary school.

In summary, a number of projects employing different research strategies are being presently being implemented. Additionally, a number of grant proposals developed jointly between CURE and Portland Public Schools have been submitted to various funding agencies. These projects would build upon existing work in dropout prevention and visual mathematics.

DISSEMINATION

CURE is dedicated to being an applied research center. This means that a wide variety of research issues and methods will be supported, but project outcomes must be relevant to concerned practitioners. Therefore, we are committed to disseminating the findings of our research in the broadest possible manner. A number of dissemination strategies are being employed to publicize findings and ongoing activities. They include:

. ***Research Bulletins*** to provide brief (2-page) descriptions of project activities and findings in non-technical terms;

. A ***Center Paper Series*** to include more extensive (25-50 page) project descriptions, literature reviews, and position papers.

. ***Books*** providing a broader body of information relevant to CURE program areas;

. ***Professional Presentations*** on CURE projects and topics of interest to the community of professionals working with at-risk youth;

. ***Research Symposia*** are sponsored at least twice a year on CURE content areas where information sharing among researchers and practitioners will enhance knowledge.

. ***Workshops*** for practitioners growing out of findings from CURE research are planned to begin in Fall of 1990;

. A ***CURE Newsbrief*** is published periodically to describe CURE activities and provide other information on issues of at-risk youth.

. An ***Annual Report*** is published to provide background information about CURE and its agenda.

Other innovative strategies for circulating information are being considered, including production of short videotapes to overview specific activities and their results. A mailing list of approximately 2,000 names has been created to support CURE's dissemination process. Included are administrators, teachers, counselors, researchers, and policy makers at local, state, and national levels. Anyone wishing to be added to the mailing list should write Ava Lynch, CURE secretary at PSU, P.O. Box 751, Portland, OR 97028 or call (503) 725-4635.

CENTER PROGRESS

CURE's first two years of operation were marked by a number of important activities to lay the proper groundwork for future growth. The challenge for a new organization is to simultaneously manage both organizational and programmatic growth.

CURE's major priorities during this period were to: (1) develop an effective organization capable of conducting and disseminating research, (2) identify a program of research responsive to the needs of at-risk students, and (3) build the necessary collaborative networks to ensure a relevant and useful program.

Organizational Development

An important first stage of development was the definition and recruitment of a full time staff to spearhead the implementation of CURE's program. Staff and faculty of both Portland Public Schools and the PSU School of Education assisted in the hiring of a Deputy Director, two Research Associates and a secretary. A CURE Office was established in PSU's Education Building to house the staff.

The creation of managerial and budget procedures for the Center were of considerable importance. Appropriate fiscal guidelines have been established and are operative to handle necessary contracts and external grant proposal submissions. For example, several contracts have been written with Portland schools to support work performed for CURE by district personnel. Also, an internal research review and monitoring process has been created to ensure high standards on projects. In addition, a systematic dissemination program is now in place which identifies how useful products or outcomes of CURE activities will be made available to potential audiences.

Research Program Development

Developing a responsive research agenda is an ongoing process. During CURE's first year a variety of researchers and educators from PSU, Portland Schools, and other local and state agencies volunteered to serve on one or more research design teams to help define initial projects. These teams were organized around four content areas. Nine of the 13 projects initiated in CURE's first two years were proposed by staff and faculty of PSU and Portland Schools. These *field initiated* studies were shaped to both draw upon the expertise and interests of available researchers and to best meet CURE's research goals.

During year two the Management Team defined three program areas of concentrated research to tighten the focus of activities. Current and future work will be more complementary by being organized within the scope of dropout prevention, instructional practices, and effective school leadership. These areas are broad enough to capture the complexity of the challenges facing our children today, but narrow enough to allow project outcomes within specific areas to build upon one another. Thus, more efficient use can be made of limited resources. Project proposals are submitted each year to the CURE management team for new or continuing funding. Thus, priorities and resources can also be adjusted to address emerging issues.

Many projects are in the second year of funding and have entered analysis and reporting phases. Several written products have already been produced and are available through the Center, and many more reports and presentations are being developed.

Training and technical assistance activities are also being generated from contacts made during projects.

Network Building

Creating a research center to impact positively on the lives of children requires the dedication of many people both within and outside the organization. Great concern was given to establishing networks of communication and collaboration during CURE's first two years. These networks exist at the local, state, and national levels. The central collaboration of course is between staff and faculty of PSU and Portland Schools. Care has been given to involve as many dedicated individuals as possible from both organizations on center efforts. Again, this has taken considerable time and energy, but it is essential to build and maintain a collaboration with a common and consistent vision of the center's mission.

Expansion plans for next year's research agenda includes a project to provide systematic support and training for classroom teachers in the area of teacher-directed research. In addition, a pilot study is preparing a policy level analysis paper how changes in numbers and needs of "at-risk" students over the next five years might impact school districts in the Portland metropolitan area. The benefit of this analysis and possible future analyses will be assessed with key administrators from a number of districts to determine whether an ongoing at-risk policy project would be valuable. These two possible new projects would extend CURE network building more strongly into the classroom and the district office.

CURE has engaged in several external collaborations in its first two years. These include:

. Collaboration with the Governor's Student Retention Initiative Program to design and implement the Statewide Follow-Along Study of the Class of 1992.

. Collaboration with the *Math Learning Center* at PSU in the implementation of the research project "Effective Mathematics Instruction for Black, Hispanic, and Native American Students."

. Collaboration with the Oregon Department of Education on the funding of a research and evaluation project of the new State Prekindergarten Program.

. Co-sponsorship with Seattle Public Schools and the Council of Great City Schools of a seminar entitled "Developing Improved Alternative Models for High School Programs and Services for At-Risk Urban Youth."

. Collaboration with the Council of Great City Schools, New York University, Georgia State University and the University of California at Los Angeles on submission of a proposal to the federal competition for the "Center for Research on the Education of Disadvantaged Students."

. Inclusion of key researchers from the University of Oregon, Teaching Research Division, and Oregon Research Institute in a proposal for grant funding to implement and research a comprehensive dropout prevention program for handicapped students in middle school.

SUMMARY

Creating collaborative projects between public school districts and universities are always challenging. However, they are critical to mounting successful responses to the serious problems facing educators in 1990. Research collaborations are the same as other collaborative efforts; they require a lot of work by dedicated individuals on both sides to communicate visions, needs and concerns. CURE has taken modest, but significant steps in the past two and one half years to build a lasting research consortium between Portland State University and Portland Public schools to serve the educational needs of students who are at-risk of academic failure. We encourage other districts and universities to consider similar efforts for their students.

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